

Our Time

INCORPORATING POETRY AND THE PEOPLE

April 1943

THE COWBOY AND HIS MUSIC

by A. L. LLOYD

ETERNAL PRAGUE

Commentary for a Documentary Film

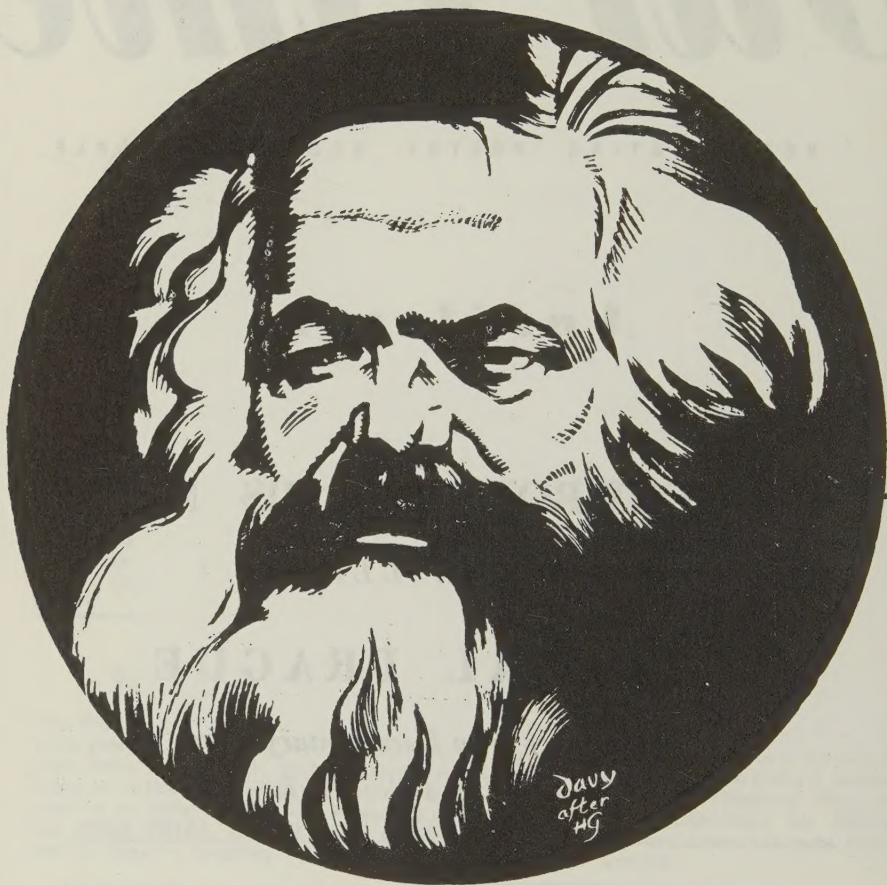
by LAURIE LEE

AND CRITICAL ARTICLES OF TOPICAL INTEREST

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KARL MARX (1818-1883)

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- 3 Commentary for a Documentary Film entitled *Eternal Prague* LAURIE LEE
- *7 A Marxist Approach to the Theatre ERIC CAPON
- 11 Conscience, Dialectics and Original Sin JAMES HEMMINGS
- 12 The Cowboy and his Music A. L. LLOYD
- 21 Red Roses for Me: a Play in Four Acts by Sean O'Casey SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER
- 23 Films and Big Business J. F.

Notes and Comments

Marx Anniversary

THE SIXTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE death of Karl Marx is being celebrated by an Exhibition on *The Life and Work of Karl Marx* at the new Marx House premises, 1, Doughty Street, W.C.1. The Exhibition was opened on Saturday, March 6th, by William Rust, the editor of the *Daily Worker*, before an enthusiastic gathering. In his opening address, he spoke of the immense value of Marx's work, the product of a man who enjoyed life to the full. He stressed the importance of the revolutionary discoveries of Marx, not as dry-as-dust dogmas to be learnt by rote, not as theories to be studied and accepted like beliefs, but as guides to action. He traced the development from Marx to the victories of the Red Army, the most recent proof of the validity of this explanation of social change.

Dr. John Lewis, speaking for the General Council of Marx House, admitted that this organisation, even in its new premises, was insignificant in relation to the immense influence

of the scientific philosopher whose name it bears. He reminded his listeners, on the other hand, that Marx himself when living in London might have been regarded as no less insignificant in comparison with the work he was undertaking. He also reminded his audience that the work which Marx House was doing, and the greater work it intended to do, cost money, and that while they were all anxious to put available money into the various forms of war savings, Marx House was itself also an important front, where the causes of the war, the conduct of the war, and the ultimate recovery from it would have to be studied, and where plans of action would be laid. Those who were present at this meeting contributed generously to the funds, encouraged by the Exhibition which covered walls and tables, and which gave an instructive bird's eye view of the subject.

* * *

Anti-semitism

FROM THE CONTEMPLATION OF SUCH

* See page 1, February issue

extraordinary achievements, it is like coming to another world to turn one's mind to the damage perpetrated on the Lenin Memorial, and the reappearance of the "Perish Judah" slogan now to be seen on odd walls. Sixty years after the death of Marx, we have learnt so little, and it is as well to be reminded of the continued existence in our midst of fascist groups. The fact that the offenders in such cases are left undisturbed has been taken up elsewhere. There is one aspect which needs our attention.

In artistic and entertainment circles, the people of this country are much indebted to Jewish talent, originality and drive. Historical circumstances have played a large part in directing these talents to cultural activities, where they are often supreme. From jealousy and fear in the artistic world, especially in the music profession, feelings against the Jews are easily created. At the best, they are only latent, and at any moment may come disturbingly into the open. To regard this as an isolated, personal problem, as so many people do, is to run the risk of being overtaken by this medieval prejudice. It is essential to understand it fully, to immunise our minds against the poison which is being constantly instilled, and so to save others from the same dangerous intellectual bewilderment. For this purpose we can recommend no better book than I. Rennap's *Anti-semitism and the Jewish Problem*. The author explains clearly the historical background of the Jews as a minority, and the use to which it has so often been turned for political ends. If you still have doubts about such matters, the *Fall of France*, by Ilya Ehrenburg, will satisfy you as to how far a ruling minority will go to ensure its power and privileges.

A Plan for Art and Entertainment

DWELLING AGAIN ON THE VALUE OF Marx's theories and elucidations, it is astonishing to find that it has played so little conscious part in the organisation of our cultural life. We are, perhaps, prepared to accept the importance of his guiding in industrial matters, or in the wider life of nations and peoples, but we overlook the necessity for it in affairs closer to hand. In both art and entertainment we have reached the point where organisation matters above all. Talent, equipment and other means of production are available in music, theatre, and art generally, but how to get them working well together has been beyond us. Most of those who are engaged on the various problems spend their lives in a round of activities, where detail succeeds detail, going from day to day and never catching up sufficiently to stop and look round. The relation of their work to the ever-widening public is considered only by a ready-made rule of thumb, and their work is seldom, therefore, adapted consciously to changing conditions.

When it is, it has rarely more than a temporary intention. The world of music, at the present time, shows such opportunism at its worst. The astonishing growth in the demand for the music of symphony orchestras has been one of the striking features of the war period. The London Philharmonic Orchestra, which seems to have done a great deal in inaugurating the movement, keeping it going when conditions were at their least propitious, received a certain amount of well-deserved publicity. This, no doubt, ducer could make more than a very

(Continued on page 10)

Commentary

for a Documentary Film entitled

Eternal Prague

by Laurie Lee

THESE are the waters of that Bohemian river
which pour from mountain forests into Prague,
and coil like arms around its ancient fortress,
watching with gliding eyes the rigid stones
where men have forged their nation and its story.

SHE saw the men of Prague when first they came
out of the East to search new fields for pasture,
she saw them raise their children on her banks,
she washed their wounds and bore their dead away.

These were the Czechs, they planned and built this town,
linked it with bridges and piled high the walls,
and fought a thousand battles to defend
their city's freedom and their pride as men.

Until at last, safe in their fortress walls,
they cleansed their hands of blood, and with their swords
carved peaceful angels and steep flights of stone,
climbing on steps of granite to their God
to sing and ring their bells among the clouds.

And here their spirits flowered, they rejoiced
in monuments upraised by reverent hands,
in spires and towers which their exultation
flung to the skies that all might see their faith
in stone and in the heavens twice reflected.

(Gargoyles)

Not only friendly spirits guard the city,
stone devils, imps, and vampires
grin from the lofty roofs,
and stone cocks crow,
with petrified alarm.

Here from the high cathedral we can see
Prague like a patterned carpet spread beneath us.

And yet through generations of oppression
only the privileged enjoyed that view,
the nobles walked alone in these high gardens
shutting the doors against the common people
whose fathers built this sculptured paradise.

And all this wealth, the people's heritage,
these fairy castles dressed with marble flowers,
these palaces of gold and sun-drenched fountains,
these nymphs and stairways and these fragrant gardens,
were seized and held by tyrants from the people.

Yet all these kings have died, and Prague remains,
the tyrants come and go, and still the people
return from age to age to their own right
and open wide again the cloistered walls
to claim the beauty none can hide for ever.

(To the Old Town)

Down the steep steps the people go
Into the old town which is only theirs
among the old walls where their mothers bore them,

between the houses where their children run
playing old games which outlive all invaders.

And still the river passes like a friend
wise with the ancient struggles of the past,
sharing the work and labour of the women
and carrying boats like children on her back.

The old town lives, her streets are loud
with all the bustle of the living,
with all the market's agitation
where housewives endlessly parade
seeking the next meal or the perfect bargain.

And in the market place,
beneath each coloured tent,
are piled rich stores of every merchandise.

And here the crowds come early
and the bargaining begins;
the smells of food and coffee untie the purse-strings,
and the old songs are heard. . . .

(Market Song)

Here come the old wives with their brooms,
Here come the maidens grinning O,

Here come the fiddles and the drums,
The market's just beginning O !

We'll pick some apples or some pears,
We'll choose a ripe cucumber O,

And haggle if they be too dear
From Doomsday to December O !

Who wants sausage from my stall ?
Who wants a pig's-foot jelly O ?

Whatever kingdoms rise or fall
You've got to feed your belly O !

Then gather round, we'll do you well,
We'll keep the prices even O,

And if the rich all go to hell
Then we'll all go to heaven O !

And around the market,
above the timeless heads of the people,
spread the stained-glass skies and gothic branches
where the cathedral stands
echoing the songs and chatter of a thousand such assemblies.

(Mechanical Clock)

And every hour the people raise their eyes
to gaze upon the old clock's gilded face;
to see Christ cast his blessing on the town
and Time, and Death, and Judas nod their heads,
condemning all things mortal; beauty, sin,
and tyranny and greed to common graves

(New Town)

Now mounted on the Czechoslovak lion
ride out to future worlds of steel and power,
the fine-cut, gleaming concrete,
halls of glass,
and soaring flats as clean and white as clouds,

and churches built as simple as a prayer,
and all the austere passion of an age
free from the coils and fancies of the past.

Free from its superstition and its ignorance
men cleared with joy these virgin spaces,
sealed up the sewers where the poor had lived
and built new homes broad open to the sun.
This was the modern city—Prague,
the Czechoslovaks flooded it with light,
the young grew strong and healthy in its air;

and past the statue of St. Wenceslas,
through boulevards as open as the sky,
the modern age moved swiftly on its wings.

(Roofs)

Prague holds the future and the past together,
a high roof spans the new town—and the old;

and on this ancient wall, which now has seen
invasion's ebb and flow a hundred times,
hang these two sculptured symbols:

Day, which illumed the past and will return,

and Night, the present shadow of the conqueror
hung like a plague above the silent streets.

Black night is everywhere in Europe now,
and over Prague it hangs most dense and terrible,
yet though beneath those roofs the Czechs are lying,
they do not sleep, but guard their stubborn courage,
planning the morning and the new revolt
to beat the Nazis back to their own darkness.

Fascist Aggressors! look with admiration—
over the roofs and bridges of this city,
but do not boast;
Prague has seen many like you,
her people's vengeance smashed them without pity,
her river swept their corpses to the sea.

A Marxist Approach to the Theatre

3. The Task of the Producer

by *Eric Capon*

"One of my favourite conceptions, which I have often repeated, is the necessity of the death of the regisseur in the actor's creativeness." . . . *My Life in the Russian Theatre*, by Nemirovich-Danchenko.

THERE IS SOME CONFUSION ABOUT the nature and scope of a producer's work. This is to some extent revealed by the existing confusion as to terms. On the Continent he is called a regisseur, in America a director, and here, usually, a producer. It is true that the American term is gradually supplanting the existing one, which is a desirable change, if only because it is a better description of his real position. For his main job is direction—direction of other people's energies, skill and creativeness. He is not an independent artist, welding actors, scene-designer and even playwright into a recognisable pattern, so that he "produces" a work of art out of his own imagination. It is one of the common habits of bourgeois theatre criticism to elevate one or another of the departments of the theatre to a position of supreme importance. There was the Craigian school which reduced the actor to a puppet and elevated the producer-cum-scene designer, or the literary critics to whom the playwright was supreme. Finally, we have witnessed the theatre where the actor is both star, manager and producer. But all these theories violate that collective aspect of the theatre that has been stressed so often in these articles, and it is only in the light of that aspect that the task of the producer can be viewed in proper perspective.

It must be admitted at the outset that the producer is not a prime necessity in the theatre. Theatre can, and often does, exist when there are only actors, for one of them can easily write the dialogue (or as with children it may be extemporised) and another can paint the scenery. But it does not follow from this that a producer is unnecessary to-day in most normal theatres. His position as the central director arose as a historical necessity when the theatre reached, like any manufacturing process, that degree of complexity and specialisation as to require some such direction. For he is concerned with the whole, whereas all the other artists and technicians are each concerned with a part only, whether an individual role or a particular section of the stage mechanism. It is his very heavy responsibility to see that the total effect of the production is a correct one, that its message is clear and that it normally arouses the right response in the audience. It is on this he should be judged, on whether the audience leaves the theatre perfectly clear as to what the play is about, having laughed or been stirred in the right places, and so with their minds clarified and their resolutions strengthened. Questions of detail are entirely secondary to this. They are important to the producer only in so far as they assist or hinder the main intentions. Naturally, in prac-

tice, every tiny point does matter, but differently to the producer than to the individual actor.

Since the producer's first duty is to ensure clarity on the play's main theme, it is clear, first, that this cannot be left to chance, and secondly it requires a very profound sociological approach. For plays must by their very nature be about groups of people, and to unravel the threads that tie their lives together, necessarily crosses very rapidly into political terrain, since political theory is by its very nature a science that seeks to explain the laws that govern man considered not as an individual so much as a member of a group. Hence the importance for a Marxist to apply his political theory to his work as a producer. It is for this reason that a period of discussion with the cast is imperative, otherwise there is no certainty that they have arrived at the same conclusions as he has. There is a convenient technique for these discussions of which division of the play into episodes is the principal feature. These divisions, which, roughly speaking, trace the course of the play, enables a cast to grasp the play as a whole, and in particular, how it progresses from point to point. Besides this valuable lesson, there is also time afforded during this period for discussion of each individual character and its relation to the whole. At the end, the cast should have a clear understanding both of the whole play and of their individual contribution to it. Then, and only then, is it time to go "on the floor." Here, therefore, is a method whereby the paramount importance of the political understanding of the producer can be demonstrated. For it is up to him to guide and lead throughout these discussions. When the first night comes they will certainly not be found to be time

wasted, for they will have given a cast a cohesion and a collective understanding which they will otherwise have lacked. But it all depends, of course, on correct political understanding, otherwise errors will be made that will show themselves in the smallest technical points.

The problem does not, however, end here. Supposing for instance, a producer—generally the first to receive a play—goes home, reads it, ponders over it, analyses it, and finally meets his cast to find them, or at least some of them, in violent disagreement with him. What should be the procedure? Is the producer necessarily right? This depends on the whole conception of the role of the producer in his relation to his cast. There is quite a school of thought that elevates him into a kind of petty dictator. To them, the actor is given by the producer his movements, his gestures and even his feelings. He becomes, in fact, plasticine to be moulded according to the producer's will. There have been brilliant examples of this type of producer, of which there was perhaps no better example than Meyerhold. Usually like the latter they are superb actors turned producers and very often they can quite literally play nearly all parts better than their actors.

But this method kills in the end all the actor's initiative, by reducing him to a puppet. Once again, therefore, it destroys the theatre as a collective activity. The truth is that the producer's work lies rooted in the actor's creativeness and he must submerge his personality in the collective will of the cast. The sort of actor that relies too much on the producer ends by becoming lifeless. Vakhtangov used to say to students of that sort, "You'd like to get by with only the material I give you. It's not enough. If you continue

this way, anybody who'll see the production will say, 'There's no individuality in the actors.'" A good phrase coined for the alternative and correct method is "creative reciprocity." That is how B. Zakhava, one of Vakhtangov's successors in the theatre which bears his name, describes it, and it is a useful and fruitful expression. For it suggests that the producer has a right to expect as much initiative from each of his cast (and all this applies to backstage as well) as he supplies personally. Self-respecting actors will always refuse the abrogation of individuality demanded by the dictator-producer; only relatively lifeless and unimaginative ones will accept it. It is, of course, part of the producer's concern to see that an atmosphere exists in which it is possible for actors to show initiative. If it is not forthcoming either the producer is using the wrong personnel or he is, whether consciously or not, discouraging those he has got. So the answer to the original question posed becomes clearer. The producer is never necessarily right if there is a disagreement with his cast. For, while it remains true that if the disagreement persists after long and exhaustive discussion, one of the two parties must go; the important point to be noted is that it is only after such discussion such a step would be necessary. If "creative reciprocity" is really understood and practised, it should rarely be necessary.

From all this it follows that a producer should be someone possessing a certain kind of talent, and a different kind of one from that possessed by any that work under his direction. It is not necessary for him to be as good an actor as his lead, any more than a good conductor is necessarily as good a violinist as his leading player. Indeed, his whole position is very analogous to

that of a conductor. Like him, he is primarily concerned with synthesising all that the other artists contribute. He has to fit together the various personalities that make up the production into a clear and recognisable pattern. He has, finally, to canalise everybody's efforts into flowing in the same direction. Before leaving the analogy, it is worth remembering that with Toscanini, one is always conscious of Beethoven (or whoever is being played) rather than of Toscanini. It is his peculiar genius to make the composer's intentions so clear that even in a very well-known work we seem to be hearing it almost for the first time, as it were, stripped and unadorned. It should be the same with a good producer, only not merely to interpret the playwright's intentions, but the entire will and aim of that collective, composed of actors, designers, musicians, electricians, writers and so forth that go to make up a production.

The position in England to-day is rather a special one. Except, possibly, for Mr. Tyrone Guthrie, there is scarcely one producer whose name ranks, as a producer, with Reinhardt, Orson Welles, or many of the great Russians. If they are well-known to the public it is usually for two reasons. Either they made their names as actors first, or they are better known for film direction. This is a serious situation because, for reasons already stated, very good actors do not necessarily make good producers, and film technique, though it is analagous, is different. The real explanation is surely the lack of any permanent companies with any high standard. The one exception, the Old Vic, has provided the one exception to this generalisation. Without a permanent company, housed in a permanent building, it is very unlikely that a producer could make more than a very

limited reputation. For how can he direct the efforts of a collective and reach any depth of subtlety, if the collective is assembled for one production only. That is why we have not had in London in the past decade or so, anything to equal, say, Jouvet at the Athénée, Baty at Montparnasse, or Dullin at the Atelier—to quote another capital to Moscow. Even a small theatre like the Gate brought Mr. Peter Godfrey and Mr. Norman Marshall into a certain prominence. Consequently, it is impossible in this article to illustrate from native examples,

largely because the conditions are such that they do not exist. Sometimes outstanding talent moving in the right direction is shown, such as Mr. Michael Redgrave's two productions last year, which were exceedingly hopeful. But it requires a considerable economic and organisational change before the art of production can seriously bear comparison with the best foreign examples. Prospective and actual producers, therefore, have even more than actors to fight for the sort of theatre in which their art can truly flourish.

Notes and Comments

(Continued from page 2)

aroused the envy of other orchestras and concert promoters, and when conditions became more favourable—but not before—they lost no time in following the L.P.O. policy of taking music to the people. In some cases this was a very good thing, based as it was on an understanding of the new developments, and aimed at reaching those places still not catered for. But the situation needs watching. Mushroom orchestras come into existence, far behind the others in size and quality, but directed by those who have studied the lower public taste and intent on profiting by it. This cannot be a good thing. In fact, there is every chance that such a pirate attitude to the new desire for music may undo much of the good that has been done in this direction during the war period.

Fortunately, there are prospects of an attempt to deal with these problems on a national scale, where lies the only chance of success. Here is a job for C.E.M.A., the Musicians' Union and, in fact, any body which places the social aspect of music first and foremost.

Readers Forum

(Continued from page 28)

by the people. If only short lived things (of the type of "Call me early") are produced at first, that is better than moribundity.

For some of our poets to discipline themselves, by working together to produce powerful left-wing parodies of some of our banal and debilitated current popular songs, for wide circulation, would be a step forward.

Finally, our models should not be Lewis, Spender, Auden, or Paul Potts. "Bless 'em all," "Ballad for Americans," such things as "By Golly, I was surprised," and perhaps "Frankie and Johnny" are the beginnings. And the book "Poems for Spain" and back numbers of "Poetry and the People" should be within every poet's reach, with Iain Lang's "Background of the Blues" that contains more and better songs than have been produced in western Europe this last twenty years.

GRAHAM BOATFIELD

Conscience, Dialectics and Original Sin

James Hemmings

FEW CONCEPTIONS ARE MORE detestable to a Marxist than the orthodox religious view that a child is born in sin and lacks within its own being the power to live finely. Man, the Marxist believes, is born for dignity and nobility and greatness, to which he will attain by natural growth as soon as he has created a society that does not frustrate him.

This does not, of course, mean that a high quality of character can be attained without effort. Struggle and growth are the essentials of human development as of all development. Selfishness is strong in undeveloped man because, in his remote past, to be selfish was necessary to survival; the need to act socially came later in his biological history as a contradiction (negation) of the essentially selfish, isolated way of life. Each man is an inheritor of all the past experience of the race, and has these conflicting forces within himself, and he must, if he is to change in a progressive way (since he, like all things, must change one way or the other) bring his instinctive selfishness and his instinctive social feelings into the acutest possible contradiction in his consciousness. If he does this he will pass beyond conflict into maturity as a balanced purposeful socialist man (negation of negation).

The man who finds himself tempted to take a shift at home when his presence is urgently needed at the factory is experiencing this dialectical conflict within himself. If he brings all the effects of his action one way or the other to full consciousness he will create such an acute contradiction between his selfish and social urges, that he will overcome his temptation and, by

shouldering his responsibilities to his fellow men, step out towards the development of his finest personality.

What are sometimes referred to as prickings of conscience are, then, seen dialectically, the signs of struggle within a man which are essential to his development. Growth towards what is finer is a natural part of man. A Soviet citizen is aware of this, and is constantly striving to improve himself and the standard of his life and work, and eagerly accepts the criticism of his fellows by which he will become aware of contradictions within himself and eliminate them. Thus man and the society in which he lives follows a similar path in growing and changing into higher types.

The reactionary is an out-of-date person. He cannot bring to consciousness the contradictions within his life or he would cease to be a reactionary. He is forced, therefore, to degenerate and does so, shall we say, from being a benign capitalist with a love for cats and respected by (nearly!) all men to a blatant Fascist maintainer of plug-uglies and concentration camps.

What is original in man is not sin but the power to change, grow, develop and achieve. "Sin" is the result of obstructing this power. It is another name for failure; and failure is something which Socialist Man cannot accept as an entity in itself but only as a spur to greater effort and clearer thinking: "to dry one's eyes and laugh at a fall, and, baffled, get up and begin again," until finally victorious whether it be over a tendency to drunkenness or sloth, a problem of production, a scientific puzzle, the North Pole, or Fascist barbarians.

The Cowboy and his Music

by A. L. Lloyd

Reprinted from "University Forward." The Musical Quotations are new however.

EVERYBODY KNOWS SOMETHING about the cowboy, with his free-and-easy manners and his twin Colt guns and his five-gallon hat. Everybody has some idea how he lived his life, how he went about his work, and what his songs sounded like. For the cowboy legend is one of the most highly-coloured and most widely-spread of any in our time, and the mark the cattle-hand has made in popular culture is probably deeper than that made by any other single section of working men anywhere. That being so, it is all the more striking to reflect that this legend, this culture, this whole mythology is the product of a small community of men, probably not more than ten thousand at their strongest, who lived, worked and sang for the brief spell of 30 years, roughly between 1860 and 1890, and then, to all intents, were seen and heard no more. It was round about 1860 that the first big cattle runs were set up on real commercial lines. By 1880 the Great Plains were crawling with cattle, and world boom in western beef was on. And round about 1890 the plains were overstocked and the long grass gave out. The boom days were gone, the big cattle corporations vanished. And when they went the cowboy was out of a job and his day was done.

This is indeed a fresh chapter of musical history—the songs of a way of life and work which had only a few years' span among a handful of

men, but which have deeply stirred the popular imagination ever since, until there is hardly an English speaking person who hasn't heard either the real songs of the plains (like "Bury Me Not On the Lone Prairie") or their commercial echo (like "When My Spurs Go Jingle Jangle").

Just over a century ago a hundred thousand cattle roamed across the plains in the south-east of Texas. They didn't belong to anybody in particular, and nobody in particular bothered anything about them. They grew and multiplied and roamed. They were big-boned, rangy brutes with the long horns of a domestic beast gone wild. They were hard to handle and hard to eat, and nobody, as I say, thought any more about them.

Not until the Civil War, that is. Then the need of fighting men to eat brought big army contracts to get-rich-quick men, who, casting their eyes around, saw the makings of a fortune lying about loose on the Texas plains. The grass was there, mile upon mile, horizon beyond horizon of it. The cattle were there too, but only a few of them, and those not a commercial proposition, not on the lines the army contractors dreamed of. They began to bring fat cattle down to the plains, and to let them cross with the sinewy Texas longhorns, and so the great Western cattle industry was born. When the Civil War was over there were five million cattle in South-

Eastern Texas. You could buy a beast for four dollars there, and if you hired men to overland that beast a thousand miles away, to one of the Northern States, a man there would give you fifty dollars for it. Naturally in the words of a big cattle breeder, many people "took vigorous steps to connect the four dollar cow with the fifty dollar market."

The ranching industry grew and developed. To hard work was added technical skill, and often to toil and skill was added exploitation and corruption in more open and sensational forms than even young, violent, get-rich-quick America had ever seen. And to the world, the symbol of the cattle kingdom, with all its hard work and all its violence, but none of its profit, was the cowboy.

Legend has dolled the cowboy up into a free, romantic figure. Contemporary accounts of the cowboy's life dealt mostly with isolated violent and colourful events. Very few and far between are reliable accounts of the real facts of a cowboy's life—how he worked, and what he ate, and what his wages were, and all such simple but decisive things as that. When we do come across such an account, from a reliable source, it gives us a shock. One such account begins with these words:—

"To most people, the cowboy is a bold, bad man, as reckless of others' lives as of his own, with only vague ideas as to morals and especially rights of property; generally full of whisky, always handy with a revolver. Actually, the cowboy is distinctly a member of the non-possessing, yet producing and distributing class, as much at the mercy of the capitalist as is the cotton operative. His supposed 'freedom' is no more a reality than is the spinner's."*

* Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling in "Labour Movement in America," 1888

Nearly all his songs are about his work, and the hard conditions he had to work in; and nearly all the tunes have the monotonous melancholy of life on the featureless plains, which the cowboy had to ride with hardly a let-up from April 15th each year, until December 1st, some eight and a half months later.

From December to mid-April, the cowboys, or rather, the majority of them, were stood off, out of work, unpaid. In the spring, outdoor work began. Cattle had to be mustered, branded, ear-marked, ready for their long journey north. To get the cattle on the trail, the cowboys, six of them, say—would have to round up over an area of anything from four square miles to four thousand. Then, when all the identification marks were cut on their ears and burnt on their hides, the cattle would have to be over-landed to the summer pastures to the north of the great plains. Whether rounding cattle up or over-landing them, the cowboys working time in the saddle was from morning till night, and often all night, too. He had to have a brain that was proof against the boredom of driving cattle week after week over the featureless plains. He had to have a brain that would keep cool during the dangerous stampedes. One cowboy told Eleanor Marx, "Sometimes we ride two hundred miles before we get the cattle under, and in all that time none of us gets a moment's rest nor a bite to eat." When the cattle were being herded across streams, they would mill, and swim round and round. Drowning was a common cause of death among cowboys. There were innumerable dangers from marauders, from gunmen hired by rival companies, sometimes from Indians, often from prairie fires. And the ranch management would expect the herd not only to be

delivered safe and all told, but also to have put on weight since leaving the ranch. Of his life, his early rising and late to bed, and the monotony and hardship of it, the cowboy had a song called "Roll Out, Cowboy."

Oh, the cowboy's life is a dreary life,
Some say it's free from care,
Ridin' in the saddle from mornin'
till night

In the midst of a prairie so bare.

Then at half-past four

The noisy cook will roar

"Whoopa whoopa hey, roll out,
cowboy."

Slowly we rise, with sleepy feelin'
eyes

The sweet dreamy night has
passed away.

The cowboy's life is a dreary life

He's driven through the heat and the
cold

While the rancher is a-sleepin' on
his velvet couch

Dreamin' of his silver and his gold.

Springtime comes, double trouble
will begin

The weather is fierce and cold

Our clothes are wet and frozen to
our skin

And the cattle we can scarcely
hold.

So, week in, week out, all day long
the over-landing would go on.

Lulled in the cradle of the horse's
stride, the cowboy would sing to
while the time away, and to encour-
age the herd along. Most of these
trail songs have the rhythm of a
horse's walk, and the melancholy of
the dusty plains, like "Old Paint."

I'm ridin' Old Paint and leadin'
Old Dan

I'm off to Montana to throw the
hoolihan

They feed in the coulees, they water
at the draw

Their tails are all matted, their backs
are all raw

Ride around them little dogies,
ride round them slow

For they're fiery and snuffy and
a-rarin' to go.

Oh, when I die, take my saddle
from the wall

Put it on my pony, lead him out of
his stall

Lash my bones to his back, turn our
faces to the west

And we'll ride the prairie that we
love the best.

Ride around them little dogies,
ride round them slow

For they're fiery and snuffy and
a-rarin' to go.

So they would ride slowly past
hundreds of miles of dogweed, sage-
brush, fenceposts, wires, thistles, in
all weathers. At night they would
halt the herd and let them graze
awhile before they settled down.
After supper the cowboys would get
round a crackling twig fire in the
open and yarn, and perhaps one of
them would sing one of the pioneer
songs of thirty or forty years before,
one of those songs whose queer,
slightly barbarous pentatonic melo-
dies testify to the Gaelic origin of so
many cowboy tunes. Most of the
early cattlemen came from the
uplands of Arkansas and Kentucky,
and the influence of their mountain
music made a deep impression on the
older cowboy songs. Within twenty
years, however, the old pentatonic
influence had quite given way to a
more modern Irish style of melody.
Few of the old style cowboy songs
have survived, though there must,
at one time, have been a considerable
body of them. Most popular were
the ballads of the hazardous times
when everywhere beyond the Platte
River in Nebraska was no-mans-land
and where there were no cattle but
buffalo, and no settlers, only Black-
feet Indians, Crow Indians and
Sioux Indians.

SIUX INDIANS

I'll sing you a song, though it may
be a sad one,
Of trials and troubles where first
they begun.
I left my dear kindred, my friends
and my home,
Across the wild deserts and moun-
tains to roam.

I crossed the Missouri and joined a
large train,
That bore us o'er mountain and
valley and plain,
And often of evenings, out hunting
we'd go,
To shoot the fleet ant'lope and wild
buffalo.

We heard of Sioux Indians all out
on the plain,
A-killing poor drivers, and burning
their train.
A-killing poor drivers with arrows
and bows;
When captured by Indians, no
mercy they show.

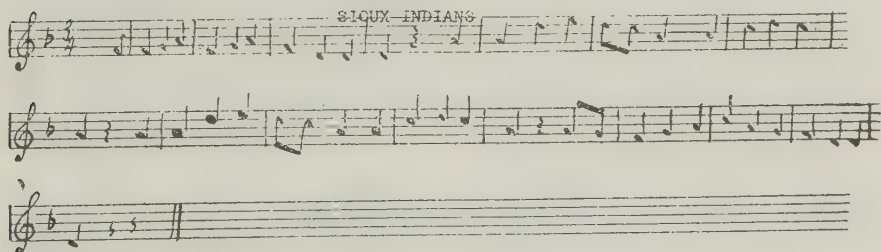
We travelled three weeks till we
came to the Platte,
And pitched out our tents at the
edge of the flat.
We made down our blankets on the
green grassy ground,
While our horses and mules was
a-grazing around.

While taking refreshment we heard
a low yell,
The whoop of Sioux Indians, coming
up from the dell.
We sprang to our rifles, with a glint
in each eye.
"Boys," said our brave leader,
"we'll fight till we die."

They made a bold dash and came
near to our train,
And the arrows fell round us like hail
and like rain,
And with our long rifles, we fed 'em
cold lead,
Till many a brave warrior around us
lay dead.

We shot their bold chief at the head
of his band.
He died like a warrior, with a gun
in his hand.
When they saw their bold chief
laying dead in his gore,
They whooped and they yelled, and
we heard them no more.

We hitched up our horses and
started our train.
Three more bloody battles that trip
'on the plain.
And in our last battle, three of our
brave boys fell,
And we laid 'em to rest in the green
shady dell.



Perhaps a fiddle and a guitar
would waken memories of the bad
old days of '48 and '49, of the gold-

rush road to California; "a hard
and tedious journey," as the song
describes it:—

Come, all you gals, pay attention to
my noise,
Don't you fall in love with the Kansas
boys;
For if you do, your fortune it'll be,
Johnny cake and cantelope is all
you'll see.

On the road to Californy,
It was a hard and a tedious
journey.

Far across the Rocky Mountains,
Crystal stream and flowing foun-
tains.

They'll take you out past the jet-
black hills,
Force you there much against your
wills,
Leave you behind to perish on the
plain,
For that is the way with the Kansas
strain.

On the road, etc.

Perhaps the most typical, certainly
the best known, of all the cowboy's
camp songs is the melancholy
"Bury Me Not on the Lone
Prairie," with its Irish cadences and
its curious agarophobiactal quality,
in which the cowboy expresses his
desperate longing to be buried any-
where except on the solitary plains
he has worked on all his life:—

On bury me not on the lone prairie
Where the wild coyotes will howl
o'er me.

Where the rattlesnakes hiss and the
wind moans free,

Oh bury me not on the lone prairie.

After the other cowboys have
rolled themselves up in their blankets
two or three of them would go off

to watch the herd, to keep them
"botched up" together. The most
restive beasts would be the yearling
calves, away from their mothers for
the first time, ("dogies" they call
them; Tinpan Alley versions of
cowboy songs have made the word
familiar). If the dogies became
restive, a stampede might start; if
a stampede started, the beasts stood
to lose weight; if the herd lost
weight, the cattle company lost
money. And so, if he allowed a
stampede the cowboy would be
likely to get the sack. There was
often an anxious note in the lullabies
the night watches sang to the resting
cattle and the uneasy yearlings:—

Oh, go slow, dogies, quit rovin'
around,

You have wandered and trampled
all over the ground.

Oh, graze along, dogies, and feed
kind-a slow,

And don't for ever be on the go.

Moveslow, little dogies, moveslow.
I've circle-herded and night-herded
too,

But to keep you together is what I
can't do.

My horse is legweary, and I'm
awful tired.

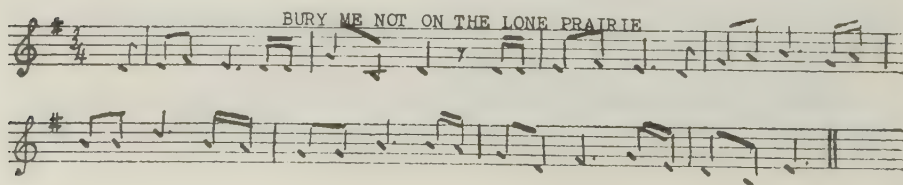
But if you get away I'm sure to get
fired.

Botch up, little dogies, botch up.
Oh, say, little dogies, when you
gonna lay down,

And quit this forever a siftin' around,
My legs are weary and my seat is
sore,

Oh, lay down, dogies, like you lay
down before,

Lay down, little dogies, lay down.



So the cowboy lived and worked. He tended his cattle all over the great plains. And on his ability and his muscles, and on skilful cross-breeding and an abundance of cheap grazing, the big cattle corporations grew up.

For twenty years after the Civil War, the cattle business expanded, and the whole world rushed to be in on a good thing. English investors calculated that a five dollar yearling fattened on the free grass would bring in fifty dollars delivered. Men who had never seen the range gambled on a rising market. And the money brought cattle. The Scotch-owned Prairie Land and Cattle Company ran 150,000 head in Colorado, New Mexico and Texas, on 7,900 square miles of country. The Chicago owned X.I.T. had 160,000 head on three million Texas acres. As the cattle came, the range grew scarcer. As the range grew scarcer the rush to occupy it became more eager. As the rush became more eager, the demand for cattle increased. And as the demand increased, the price of stock went up. The inevitable spiralling of a great bull market occurred. From being five dollars, cattle went up to thirty and thirty-five dollars in 1882. By that same year, over thirty million dollars of English and Scotch capital alone had gone into Wyoming and the Texas Panhandle. Tenderfeet came from the East, from Europe, from the Antipodes, to buy ranches. It was the great age of the range—the decade of the Texas trails and the cowboy ballads like:—

'Twas in the year of eighty-three
That A. J. Stinson hired me.

He says, "Young fellow, I want you
to go

And follow my herd down to
Mexico."

And while ranch owners got rich

quick on the plains, while enormous paper fortunes were accumulating in the beef trusts of Chicago and New York, and London, and the foundations of the big monopolies, of concerns like Vesteys and Armours (later to be transferred to the Argentine) were being laid—what were the facts of life as they affected the cowboy? In the boom year of 1882, the best cowboys earned 25 dollars a month and their keep—or rather less than £5 a month. Moreover, the cowboy had to buy all his own gear except his horses—he had to buy his five-gallon hat, his chaps, slicker, saddle, quirt, spurs, gun, boots, etc.—145 dollars worth of stuff. (If he rode his own horses, he was paid an extra £5 a year, just as the Australian station-hand is to-day). Cowboys who couldn't afford to buy their gear outright could get it on tick from the company, who would dock 15 dollars a month out of their 25, till the stuff was paid off. The gear provided by the company was often of poor quality, and Eleanor Marx testifies that the cowboy was commonly in debt to the rancher, at the end of a season's work.

Round about 1883, there were some 10,000 cowboys employed on the great plains. No class in the whole U.S.A. worked harder. None was so poorly paid. The cowboys had no organisation; while their employers were banded together into the Association of Ranchers, which Eleanor Marx has described as "one of the strongest, most systematic, and at the same time, most despotic unions ever formed to awe and dictate to labour." The conditions of work were such that it was difficult and well nigh impossible for the cowboys to organise. They were dispersed over miles upon miles of boundless plains and desolate wastes, a few here, a few there.

Concerted action was out of the question.

A kind of federation of labour associations called the Knights of Labour was growing rapidly, and many cowboys tried, through the Knights of Labour, to connect themselves with the working class. It was the fact that a Cowboy Assembly of the Knights of Labour was projected that made the Montana and Wyoming Association of Ranchers insist in 1885 that in the bunkhouses and on the plains, "men must not read books or newspapers."

Besides the most sensational kinds of labour exploitation, the owners, about 1880, began the flagrant system of robbery known as "repleving" cattle. Under the Maverick Law, the Association of Ranchers claimed the right to seize all unbranded cattle, wherever they might be found. A settler or a cowboy might acquire a few head of cattle. In time they would increase, and, in former years, he was able to sell them to the Association, or to other traders, at a fair market price. But this didn't suit the big ranchers. Just as they were "grinding out" the settlers from the land they had opened up; just as the road-agents were ousting the homesteaders from the little homesteads they had raised (and in consequence, creating outlaws, like, for example, Frank and Jesse James); so, too, the ranchers wanted all the cattle, and were determined to take it. Any unbranded animal was claimed by them. And when settlers protested, they were proceeded against by the Association of Ranchers for infringing the Maverick Law.

Judges, often stockbreeders themselves, always gave the Association the decision. And the Western Press, like everything else, was under the terrorist regime of the ranchers. So

repleving went on merrily, and the small settlers, robbed of their little stock, became cowboys and the wage-slaves of the ranchers, who were "all staunch upholders of the sacred rights of property" (Marx and Aveling, op. cit.).

These were the days of the desperados, some of them hired gunmen as I have said, and some of them dispossessed men smarting under injustice, with a grudge against the world, Billy the Kid, the James boys, Bob Younger and his brother Cole, of whom the cowboys sang:—

Oh, as we rode t'ards Texas, they
call the Lone Star State,
'Twas on Nebraska's prairie the
James boys we did meet.
With knives and guns and pistols we
all sat down to play,
A-drinkin' of good whisky, to pass
the time away.

A Union Pacific Railroad train we
there planned to surprise,
The crimes done by our bloody hands
bring tears in to my eyes.
The engineer and the fireman killed,
conductor escaped alive,
But the others' bones lie moulderin'
beneath Nebraska's skies.

And then we saddled horses, north-
westward we did go
To the godforsaken country of
Minnseoti-o,
I had my eye on the Northfield Bank
when brother Bob did say:
"Now, Cole, if you undertake the
job, you'll surely curse the day."

I stationed out my pickets, and up
to the bank did go,
And there upon the counter I struck
my fatal blow.

"Just hand us over your money, and
make no further delay,
We are the famous Younger boys, we
spare no time to pray."

By 1885, the plains were full.

There was not an unstocked range left open in that year, and most of them were overstocked by two times and by three times. Land which had carried on steer on 40 acres was made to carry two or three or four. Few men seemed to see the danger. They took the grass for granted.

And then the cold and the snow of 1886 closed in. Cattle leave no record of their tragedies but skulls and jawbones that make no sound. But cattle companies are not so mute. Their lamentations were heard in Wall Street, in London, and, gleefully, in Buenos Aires. When the spring of 1887 came round, millions of dollars had been lost, great cattle corporations had vanished, fifty to sixty per cent. of the stock on the northern plains had been transformed into ragged heaps of hair and bone. The boom was over. And when, in 1893, the same thing happened in the south-west, the warning was universal. By 1894, the great invasion of the sheep was on, the sheep whose cleft lips cropped close and finished off the last of the ruined grass. In 1895 came the crash, and the day of the cowboy was done. For as the great corporation withdrew their money from the starving plains to re-invest them in the Argentine, work for the cowboy became harder and harder to get; and the longer his spells between employment, the deeper in debt he grew with the few remaining big

ranchers. The cowboy's day was over. It was time for him to move on. It is to the eighteen-nineties that this next song belongs, a cheerful song, a defiant song, but a song sung by men who know their position is hopeless. It is a song which tells you more than a dozen history books will tell you, and it is called "It's Time for the Cowboy to Go":—

I bin on the trail since June twenty-one,

I bin punchin' Texas cattle on the Lone Star Run,

But it's time fer the cowboy to go, to go,

It's time fer the cowboy to go.

I'm up in the mornin' before day-light,

And before I git sleepin', the moon shines bright.

I went to the office to draw my roll.

They had it figgered out I was nine bucks in the hole.

I went to the boss, and we had a little chat,

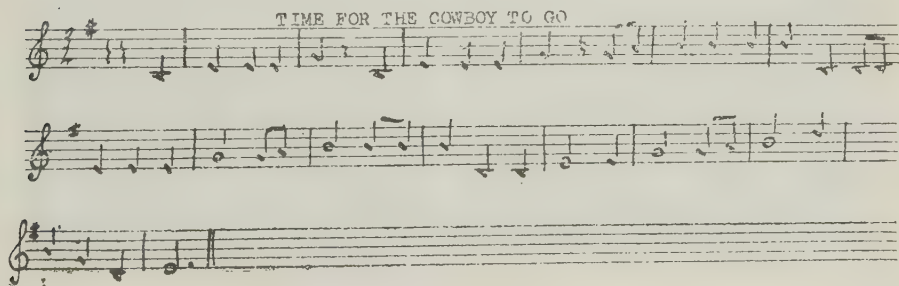
And I hit him in the face with my five-gallon hat.

Oh, the boss says to me, "I'm gonna fire you,

And not only you, but the whole flamin' crew."

Says, "The sheep they are in, and the grass it is gone,

And the cattle are dyin' on the Lone Star Run."



With my knees in the saddle and my
seat in the sky,
I'll quit punchin' cattle in the sweet
bye and bye.

But it's time fer the cowboy to go,
to go,

It's time fer the cowboy to go.

And as the cattle dwindled away
off the ranges, and the out-of-work
cowboys began to spend more and
more of their time hanging around
the saloons, pool-rooms, gambling

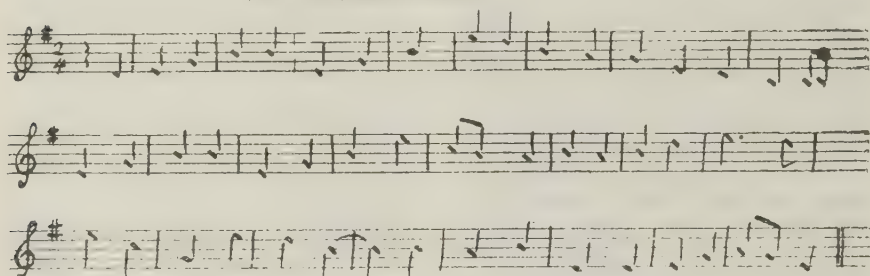
dives, waiting for the jobs that never
turned up, they began to sing a new
and melancholy song, "Ten Thousand
and Cattle Gone Astray."

Ten thousand cattle gone astray,
Left the range and wandered away,
And the songs of guns, I'm here to
" stay,

Have left me dead broke, dead broke
to-day,

In gambling hells delayin',
Ten thousand cattle strayin', strayin'.

TEN THOUSAND CATTLE



That song was the cowboy's Requiem. One by one the symbols of the Range have vanished—the buffalo, the prairie dog, the long-horn steer. The cowboy is the last to linger. From being the kingpin of a great industry, he has declined into a circus act for the rodeos, or a kind of valet on the dude ranches where rich young Americans spend their holidays roughing it in comfort. In the same way, his songs, too, have been debased into sentimental Tin Pan Alley hits like "The Last Round-Up," "The Wheel of the Wagon is Broken (And the days of the west are through)" and "I'm an old Cowhand." Yet even Tin Pan Alley cannot quite destroy the distinctive character of this idiom, whose melodies are a mixture of pioneer Virginia and shanty Irish, and whose rhythms, in the working songs, at least, rise as much from the tireless dogtrot of the cattle pony, as

they do from the perpetual-motion music of those instruments easiest to carry on the trail, the mouth-organ and the jew's harp.

Nowadays, to everybody but schoolboys, the cowboy is a joke. But fifty years ago he was no joke. And for thirty years before that he had been making his deep mark on the economic and social history of America, and on the imagination of people all over the civilised world. That mark still remains. While this article was being written, I was obliged to put my pen down for a while because my barrack-room companions were singing so loud (and in quite accurate and sincere harmonies) over their blanco-ing. They are all city boys, from London, Cardiff, Bolton. They know nothing of cattle nor of the U.S.A. The song they were singing was "Oh, Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie."

Red Roses for me

A Play in Four Acts by Sean O'Casey. Macmillan & Co. 6s. nett.

*From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life.*

ROMEO AND JULIET, MONTAGUE AND CAPULET, is an old story. Since these are Dublin lovers the clash of faiths is a natural Montagu and Capulet clash. "But there's worse still than that in it. She's th' child of a sergeant in the Royal Irish Constabulary." . . . and Ayamonn, her lover, is a Fenian and the leader of a railway workers' strike. But the antagonism lies deeper than religion, or nationality, or economics even. It is the fatal antagonism between caution and vision, between moles and eagles.

"*Sheila*: God knows I don't mean to hurt you, but you must know we couldn't begin to live on what you're earning now—could we? Oh, Ayamonn, why do you waste your time on doing foolish things?

Ayamonn: What foolish things?

Sheila: You know yourself, Ayamonn: trying to paint, going mad about Shakespeare, and consorting with a kind of people that can only do you harm.

Ayamonn (*mockingly prayerful*): O Lord, let me forsake the foolish, and live; and go in the way of Sheila's understanding.

Sheila: Listen, Ayamonn, my love; you know what I say is only for our own good, that we may come together all the sooner. (*Trying to speak jokingly*) Now, really, isn't it comical I'd look if I were to go about in a scanty petticoat, covered with a sober black shawl, and my poor feet bare. Wouldn't I look well that way!

Ayamonn: With red roses in your hand you'd look beautiful.

Sheila: Oh, for goodness sake, Ayamonn, be sensible! I'm getting a little tired of all this. . . . I risked a big row to-night to come and tell you good news: I've been told that the strike is bound to take place; that there is bound to be trouble; and, if you divide yourself from the foolish men, and stick to your job, you'll soon be a foreman of some kind or other.

Ayamonn: Who told you all this? The Inspector?

Sheila: Never mind who; if he did, wasn't it decent of him?

Ayamonn: D'ye know what you're asking me to do, woman? To be a blackleg; to blast with th' black frost of desertion the gay hopes of my comrades. Whatever you may think them to be, they are my comrades. Whatever they may say or do, they remain my brothers and sisters. Go to hell, girl, I have a soul to save as well as you."

Red Roses for Me is a poet's play; poetical in its structure, poetical in its compassion towards exasperating humanity, poetical in its implication of something much wider and more cogent than the actual events of the action. In the end, what has happened? A young man of promise has been killed in a police-charge; a performance from Shakespeare's Richard the Third in the Temperance Hall will not take place. The old mad miser will go on thinking of his money, the mother will think of

her dead son, the pious of one kind will go on thinking of their statue of the Blessed Virgin and the pious of another kind will go on thinking of their prejudices. But meanwhile there has been a vision, a Transformation Scene, and Dublin's dirty city has put on immortality. The third act of *Red Roses for Me*, which has nothing to do with the action, has everything to do with the action.

"Eeada: Th' soldiers will be chasin' us with gunfire; th' polis hoppin' batons off our heads; our sons and husbands hurried off to prison, to sigh away the time in gloomier places than those they live in now.

Ayamonn: Don't flinch in th' first flare of a fight. (*He looks away from them and gazes meditatively down the river.*) Take heart of grace from your city's hidden splendour. Oh, look! Look there! Th' sky has thrown a gleaming green mantle over her bare shoulders, bordered with crimson, an' with a hood of gentle magenta over her handsome head—look!

(*The scene has brightened, and bright and lovely colours are being brought to them by the caress of the setting sun. The houses on the far side of the river now bow to the visible world, decked in mauve and burnished bronze: and the men that have been lounging against them now stand stalwart, looking like fine bronze statues, slashed with scarlet.*)

Ayamonn: Look! Th' vans and lorries rattling down th' quays, turned to bronze and purple by th' sun, look like chariots forging forward to th' battle-front.

1st Man: Something funny musta happened, for, 'clare to God, I never noticed her shining that way before.

2nd Man: Looka the loungers opposite have changed to sturdy men of bronze, and th' houses themselves are gay in purple an' silver!

3rd Man: Our tired heads have always haunted far too low a level.

Ayamonn: There's th' great dome o' the Four Courts lookin' like a golden rose in a great bronze bowl! An' th' river flowin' below it, a purple flood, marbled with ripples o' scarlet; watch th' sea-gulls glidin' over it—like restless white pearls astir on a royal breast. Our city's in the grip o' God!

1st Man: Oh, hell, it's grand!

Eeada: Blessed be our city for ever an' ever.

Ayamonn (*singing*):

Fair city, we tell thee our souls shall not slumber

Within th' warm folds of ambition or gain;

Our hands shall stretch out to th' fullness of labour,

Till wondher an' beauty within thee shall reign.

The rest, singing together:

We vow to release thee from anger an' envy,

To dhrive th' fierce wolf an' sly fox from thy gate,

Till wise men, an' matrons an' virgins shall murmur,

O city of splendour, right fair is thy face!

Ayamonn:

Fair city, I tell thee that children's white laughter,

An' all th' red joy of grave youth goin' gay,

Shall make of thy streets a wild harp ever sounding,

Touched by th' swift fingers of young ones at play!

The rest:

We swear to release thee from hunger an' hardship,

From things that are ugly an' common an' mean;

Thy people together shall build a brave city,

Th' fairest and finest that ever was seen!"

Red Roses for Me is a play in the Grand (which is also the Popular) Manner. Like the Greek dramatists

(who were also grand and popular artists) O'Casey uses all the resources of the playwright: chorus, ballet and machinery. Even in a reading his piercing sense of the stage is everywhere apparent, from the set on which the curtain first rises to the jabbing grotesque of the man in the Tuba and the Man in the Drum in the last act. What is not so sure to this reader is the efficacy of the style of diction he has employed: a queer blend of poetry and the most arrant "poetical language." As a piece of craftsmanship it is entirely persuasive; but it will take good actors to get across such phrases as "Let no damned frosty prayer chill the sunny sighs that dread the doom of love," when such phrases are juxtaposed with others like "something struck me on the head, and I was surrounded by feet making kicks at me." Nevertheless, I back O'Casey's luck. He knows what he is doing.

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER.

Films and Big Business

By J. F.

A GREAT DEAL HAS BEEN HEARD OF the background to film making with its glamour; its heartbreak and success stories; its romances. Hollywood has been presented to us in all its aspects, and endless stories have been told of film production.

But what happens when the films are ready to be shewn? What is the present process by which Greta Garbo in her new picture arrives at your local cinema? Let us go behind the scenes of film distribution, the Big Business side.

In Great Britain, handling the finished products, whether they be made in England, America, or Russia, are ten or so major Renting companies (distributors) mainly American controlled. These, together with a few smaller ones, have formed an association called the Kinematograph Renters Society (K.R.S.), to look after the interests of its members as a whole.

The Exhibitors (the owners of the cinema where you watch Robert Taylor go through his antics) have also formed a similar body to watch over their interests. This is the Cinema Exhibitors Association (C.E.A.). These two committees are supposed to work in harmony with each other and do so until one side wants more than the other is willing to give, which is very often.

Films are hired out by the Renters either on a percentage basis (sharing gross box-office takings), or on a flat rate (a fixed sum regardless of what the house concerned takes).

A private war between Fox-Twentieth Century and the Exhibi-

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tors was waged recently on the question of terms. It ended in an uneasy armistice with the possibility of hostilities breaking out once again in the near future. Fox, for a time, refused to supply any of their products on a flat rate, and the C.E.A., taking up this challenge, stated they would not be dictated to by any renter. The argument revolved around Sunday bookings. Fox claimed that one-day bookings took up valuable transport space, as well as making for unnecessary organisational work, whereas if the exhibitors were to show their week-day film for one day more, all this waste would be obviated.

On this point I must agree with Fox, but I have a lurking suspicion that all they say about "war effort and man power" is not stated in an altogether altruistic sense. If Fox had got their way it would have meant that the exhibitors would have had to pay percentage for their Sunday films, possibly as much as 50 per cent., instead of the very low flat rate rental pay for the old re-issues they now show. As a threat to Fox, the C.E.A. (including the big circuit halls Odeon, A.B.C. and G.B.) took steps to cancel not only all the feature films of this company, but also the Movietone News and the March of Time, which are also distributed by them.

Therefore, there was the likelihood of one of the main newsreels and one of the best documentaries disappearing from the programme for a time because of sectional business interests.

Actually, no newsreel, however good and objective it may be, is booked on its merits alone. Apart from price considerations, the newsreel is used as a bait either by the salesman of the renting company, or by the exhibitor when negotiating a deal for the main features. If the

salesman finds the exhibitor wants his features, he forces his firm's newsreel in as well; or, on the other hand, if the exhibitor sees that he cannot get certain films at the terms he wants, he offers to take a newsreel if the renter will meet his terms.

The salesman's job in selling films is a well paid one, but he is subject to intense pressure all the time from his branch manager, who, in turn, is pressed by the general sales manager acting under orders from the directors, in London, in New York or in Hollywood. And no doubt even Hollywood is urged on by the banks and financiers until the whole vicious circle is completed.

A question was asked in the House of Commons why the film *Next of Kin* did not get a wider distribution than it did in view of the serious message it conveyed. A reply was given that the exhibitors were being asked to co-operate in films of this type and relax their "bar" regulations. The "bar" is a clause which the exhibitors enter into their contracts with the renters, prohibiting the hire of films they may show to opposition houses within a given radius of their own, unless played afterwards (when, of course, the cream will have been skimmed for that particular picture). Here the three major circuits wield enormous influence with their block bookings. Many small exhibitors find they cannot rent films on release dates because of a bar against their houses. In some cases a circuit cinema is a much smaller one than its independent opposition, but because of the power behind the bookings, it gets the best pictures first.

With the wartime boom you might imagine both the renters and the exhibitors would be a little more tolerant, but in spite of huge profits (British Lion, renters, have paid

50 per cent. dividend for the second year in succession, and P.C.T. and Odeon, circuit exhibitors, both made the highest profits in their history in 1942) the grasp for bigger and bigger profits remains unabated.

After a two-year struggle, *Gone With the Wind* was generally released at the latter end of 1942. This lengthy epic remained in cold storage for this time because Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer wanted in the first instance, if you please, just a cool three-quarters of the takings, and with admission prices fixed by themselves. The C.E.A. rightly objected to this imposition and stuck together solidly until A.B.C. did a back-sliding act on their colleagues to do a deal with M.G.M. on the side. What terms they eventually came to no one knows except a few people at the head of both concerns.

This Big Business side of the film industry has become a little complex due to the fact that there are now a number of big-shots who have a foot in both camps. For example, Joseph Rank, millionaire miller and financier, is a director of Odeon and G.B. as well as of General Film Distributors; E. T. Carr, head of United Artists, is also a director of Odeon; and Max Milder, head of Warner Bros., is also director of A.B.C. cinemas.

The British picturegoing public is no small fry for the American film companies, even if they can't get all their profits out in war time. Universal Films rely upon your bobs and tanners for as much as 50 per cent. of their total income.

In view of the prosperity of this industry, apart from other considerations, it would be well if the public exercised a little more control on the type of films they are shown. A useful method is to let it be known in no uncertain manner whether you approve or disapprove

of a film you are seeing by cat-calls or cheers, as the case may be. Also you should keep the manager of the cinema you frequent informed of the types of films you would like to see; the newsreel you prefer, and so on. I can assure the reader that each letter received by the management, gets very careful consideration. Don't worry about style, just let go in your letters, exactly how you feel.

Managers, exhibitors and renters, are all always on tenterhooks, wondering how the public are going to take a certain film, so, *let 'em know about it!*

Readers' Forum

WALK WITH THE POET

It takes two to write a letter. The writer plus the recipient. The one to whom the letter is written playing nearly as important a part in calling forth the best qualities of the correspondent as the correspondent himself, who rises more or less unconsciously to what is demanded of him and pours forth upon paper either his most precious pearls or merely a little spate of his commonplace prattle.

The same is true, in part, of the poet. A few poets may perhaps write their best whilst they believe themselves to be lonely champions crying in a vast wilderness of deaf ears and hardened hearts. But I believe it can only be a very few. One of the chief delights of art is its power of communication, and it must be an exquisite moment for the poet when he realises that he has transcended the conventional physical barriers and transmitted his thought and emotion to the minds of his unknown readers.

It therefore seems nearly impossible for there to be such an anomalous creature as a miser-poet as Miss Alice Shepherd suggested in

her article, Poets and Misers. Why lock within himself the wealth which is not wealth unless shared? A poet's joy must be to sing and be heard and enjoyed—a communal act—not to whisper to himself in the privacy of his bath.

So many voices have pierced the storms of war from poets who have found both the time and the spiritual stamina to face the common experiences, dreary, gruelling and strenuous, of men at war and to function with the ordered contemplation of the creator as well.

From Laurie Lee comes this vision of the vast mechanical productivity of our age,

“Look into wombs and factories
and behold
nativities unblessed by hopeful stars,
the sleek machine of flesh,
the chubby bomb,
lying together in one dreadful
cradle.”

Roy Fuller is a poet serving in the Navy who has produced this haunting expression of a moment of awareness:

“And the songs of the minute walk
into our ears;
Behind the easy words are difficult
tears:
The pain which stabs is dragged out
over years.

A ghost has made a cell of every bed.
You are not you without me and *The dead*
Only are pleased to be alone it said.
And hearing it silently the living cry
To be again themselves, or sleeping
try

To dream it is impossible to die.”

Timothy Corsellis wrote with a brave and tragically prophetic voice,
“I was ready for death,
Ready to give my all in one expansive
gesture
For a cause that was worthy of
death.”

Here is no ungenerous niggardly private ecstasy: here is the young

untried poet caught up in the major pre-occupation of this century.

Another poet who has not failed to give the flower of his personality to the present cosmic tumult is Alan Rook. He has not wasted his talent upon personal trivialities. I shall not easily forget the moment when I read for the first time his poem, “The Retreat.” Since then I have re-read it many times in many moods. Always its magic holds.

... “I see in life service, and in
dying an end
of loving. I know that the evil in
our nature

Is our fear of history, our incapacity
to suffer,

And our poor cold dread of the
crises of the future.

The sun bows. And now the earth,
the mother,

Is cold. The patient suffering of
these my friends, their

Lucid sorrow, is my burden and my
song.”

His themes are the landmarks of our harassed generation: he writes of fear, of freedom, of Dunkirk, of bombed cities, of London (“this unreal city of desperate hopes”) of the future:

“Now to achieve the retreat of
crocus

laying its head in winter's woollen
lap,

which gathers strength for to-mor-
row's flowering

to-morrow lifts, grows, splits the
earth.”

In his poem “Bombed City” there is a sharp ice-like clarity that is instantly stimulating.

“The churches lay the sorrow
Of their bricks across the pavement
And houses no longer
Cut the sky with swords.

Walk with me to the silent city
Walk with me in the fainting street
let the knife of seeing
purify your strength.”

Here is an invitation and no miser's invitation. But poets need the other half of the poem: those who hear and listen. There are so many of them, so many I would like to have had room to quote from here, Alex Comfort, J. C. Hall, John Waller, Henry Treece, David Gascoigne, Alun Lewis, Nicholas Moore, J. S. Fraser and others too and many whose names I do not yet know but are adventures to come: they belong to this generation, they are the people at war.

Let us, forswearing all misers, be lavish with our praise, our understanding and gratitude. This article is not a criticism but an appreciation, an attempt to walk with the poet, a thanksgiving that poetry is still a living function in the midst of days of despair, destruction and sterility.

Ida Proctor.

POETS AND MISERS

There has been as yet little apparent change in poetry to follow the total change in the war of June, 1941. Some reasons for this are hard to find, but one is obvious—lack of practice. The fault with poetry at the moment is more a matter of technique than anything else; the subject matter should be easy to find. In fact, the small audience that poetry has now is due to the lack of intelligible form or any connection with reality of the majority that is produced. It is all very well to praise the “masters”—Lewis, Spender, and the rest of the bunch—but in spite of their ability their verses are never used by the people, as are those of Lorca or Mayakovsky. These latter poets have made use of a language and approach either actively used or appreciated by the bulk of the ordinary people; our

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intellectual poets have seldom got anywhere near the language that the people speak.

It was said sometime ago: "the era of the lampoon and the political satire is at hand," but neither of these is yet much in evidence. The first requisite for poetry is to get attention (that invaluable disciplinarian) and an audience; other developments must follow.

It may be found that the path poetry will take here has been explored further by Plomer, with his slight cynical ballads, and by numerous writers in the latter issues of "Poetry and the People" than by any of the others. David Martin, of course, is excellent, and some of Pudney's work too, but we need more stuff of the type of Nicholas's "America Calling," or "The Mines of Ostroun," by Bezroe, applied to our conditions. To date,

far too much has been made of poets whose form and content is related only to their minds, not to their environment.

It is worth considering whether far greater use could not be made of the ballad and narrative poetry, traditional forms in this country. In this connection, it should be noted that recently a collection of translated British ballads was published in the U.S.S.R., as it was found that these had a stirring and popular appeal to many Red Army men and Soviet workers. Chaucer and our ballad makers are far better mode's than most of our rootless modern poets.

We do *not* need great poetry. And work that only clever ones can read with pleasure is doing nothing; it must not be forgotten that poetry only lives when it is used and handled
(Continued on page 10)

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